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ABSTRACT

The role of textbook publishing in educational reform is examined in this paper. The study evaluated a 4-year project in which three schools in the Netherlands implemented an open learning program (OLP) and created their own publishing company. Following the introduction, the second part provides a description of the OLP. The third part explains the development of the curriculum framework and materials, and the fourth part describes the role of the educational publisher. Recommendations are made to develop a clearly defined and financially supported "platform of ideas," field-test the curriculum design and materials together, and use an experimental commercial publisher rather than creating a publishing company. Other conditions necessary for successful collaboration between an innovative project and publishers include allocating government funding to reduce the publisher's financial risk, rewarding faculty authors, and utilizing copyright protection to safeguard project goals. One figure is included. (Contains 11 references.) (LMI)

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PRODUCING INNOVATIVE TEXTBOOKS TO ESTABLISH AN OPEN LEARNING PROGRAM.

Ellen van den Berg

1. Introduction

The relationship between textbook publishing and educational reform is a difficult one. Publishers are reluctant to experiment with innovative materials, because most teachers are unlikely to accept such materials. (Squire & Morgan, 1990, Woodward & Elliot, 1990). Textbook publishing is a commercial enterprise where profitability and the demand of the market dominate. From this point of view it is not good business being ahead of the market (a publisher expressed in McFadden, 1991). But innovative curriculum materials are by definition ahead of the market. They are also powerful tools to implement a curriculum innovation, because teachers rely heavily upon text-books (Tyson & Woodward, 1989). The lack of innovative curriculum materials are a serious threat for the implementation of a curriculum reform. Schools who want to reform their curriculum face the problem that adequate materials are unavailable. In this paper we examine the question if creating an educational publishing company by schools themselves can break through this vicious circle. The reflection on the role of textbook publishing is based upon an evaluation study of a four year project in which three schools tried to reform their traditional curriculum into an open learning program and grounded their own publishing company.
First a brief description is given of the specific context of the Open Learning Project (OLP). Then we shall describe the development of the curriculum framework and the curriculum materials of the OLP in more detail and the role the educational publisher played in that process. In the last section we draw some conclusions and present a few recommendations.

2. The context of the OLP

In 1987 three schools for adult education started with financial support from the National Government an innovation program. It was their purpose to reform their traditional curriculum into an open learning system. Open learning is both a process which focuses on optimal access to educational opportunities and a philosophy which makes learning more client and student centred. It is an approach that allows the learner to chose how to learn (modes of learning, e.g. lecture, seminar, independent learning, computer assisted instruction), when to learn (timing, frequency, duration),

where to learn (classroom, library, at home) and what to learn (learners can define what constitutes learning to them) (Cunningham, 1988, Paine, 1988).
One of the conditions for financial support by the Department of Education was that the OLP should deliver curriculum materials which can be used by other schools wishing to reform their curriculum into an open learning program too. The policy of the Department of Education is to get a more flexible system in adult education and open learning programs are instruments to reach such a flexibility.
In figure 1 we present one overview of organization of the OLP-experiment.

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insert figure 1 about here

The main conclusions of the evaluation study, based on case-study findings (Van den Berg, 1991) are:

* A four year project is too short to implement and certainly institutionalize a complex innovation like establishing an open learning program.
* The financial support from the National Government has been too small and the external support (training and guidance) was not well organized and did not answer the needs of the project.
* The internal coordination by the steering committee and the other members of the school management was very problematic, because of underestimating the difficulty of a change process in a large school organization with much part-time faculty.

Although these problems were important reasons why the project did not reach its target, there were problems in curriculum development and publishing curriculum materials, that had a more profound impact.
In the next sections we elaborate on this proposition.

3. Curriculum planning in the OLP

The design of the open learning program consisted of two stages. A curricular framework was developed, and afterwards, based on this framework, the curriculum materials were developed.

During the development of the curriculum framework some fundamental problems arose.

In the first place the concept clarification of open learning was very weak. So their was not a well defined "platform of ideas" (Walker, 1990) that serves to focus attention, energy and actions. Having a clear conception of the desired state of affairs is very critical in making the process of curriculum innovation successful (Fullan, 1991).

Especially the teachers who had to design the curriculum framework for their subject matter had not a clear vision of how an open learning program might look like (Van den Berg, 1991; Theunissen, Knip & van der Vegt, 1991).

Secondly, there was hardly any time to communicate about the ins and outs of designing an open learning program, because of much part-time faculty. Moreover, the fact that the three experimental schools were located in different towns hindered the communication between the teachers who were actually responsible for the design of the open learning curriculum. So the process of curriculum deliberation has been largely neglected.

Thirdly, there was neither adequate training to support the design process nor a systematic use of a curriculum design model.

Because of these difficulties the curriculum frameworks of the different subject matters had hardly any characteristics of an open learning program. So the resemblance between the ideal curriculum (an open learning program) and the written curriculum (a traditional framework) was very weak. Despite of this problem, which was at least partly known by the steering committee of the OLP, it was decided, because of the political and time pressure on the project to move forward with the development of curriculum materials[1]. In fact the development of the curriculum materials was not guided by an acceptable curriculum framework. Moreover, only one or two teachers were in charge with the development of a learning package for a period of eight weeks. These teachers were not supported by guide-lines or training. As a results the authors relied heavily upon the traditional textbooks in preparing their materials and many of them could not get their products ready in time. At this point the steering committee decided, with financial support of the federal government to create an educational publishing company.

1) Although textbooks constitute only one component of the instructional media kits for open learning, the emphasis has been laid on printed materials during the whole project period. There were hardly any efforts made integrating computer assisted instruction or audio and video into the open learning packages.

4. The role of the educational publisher

The educational publishing company is grounded as a private company, but with the board of the OLP as the only stakeholder, so the relationship between the two is very close. In the beginning the company had a director, a staff member and a secretary as employees.

The first task of the company was to take care of the production problems, because the first learning packages had to be completed by the start of the next school year.

Performing this job the problem of the copyright arouse: most authors had used considerable parts of already published textbooks, so the publishing company had to make arrangements with other educational publishing companies to settle this copyright problem. In some cases this was possible, in other it was not, due to the fact that textbooks of too many educational publishers were used. The lesson learned form this fact was that in the future authors would get the instruction either to apply a text-book of one particular educational publisher as a basis or to develop original materials.

Another problem was that the learning packages were not field tested at all. The most important consequence of this fact is that the materials poorly met the needs of the teachers and the students. And the publishing company has to do a lot of editing in order to get spelling and type errors out of the materials and to make a uniform lay-out.

The ambition of the director of the OLP publishing company was greater than being a manager of a company doing the simple editing work only. He wanted and became a member of the steering committee of the OLP. Considering the ultimate plans of the OLP publishing company, to become the main provider of open learning packages in the country, it was quite understandable that the director wished to influence the decision making in the project.

Several issues originated from the participation of the director of the publishing company.

Firstly in a project with so many coordination problems it appeared difficult to give clear directions from the point of view of educational publishing.

Secondly, there were sometimes conflicts of interest between the intentions of the OLP and the commercial claims of publishing. In the OLP the management wanted the authors to be teachers of one of the three schools in order to build the expertise of developing open learning packages within the organization. The director of the publishing company wanted the best authors possible (no matter if they were a teacher of one of the three experimental schools or not) in getting high quality materials. (In reality this problem solved itself, because both internal and external authors were

difficult to obtain due to the low payment in relation to the amount of work that had to be done).

Another point was that the projectmanagement wanted open learning packages for all subject matters, while the publisher wanted to give priority to subject matters in which most students were interested in.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

1. One of the major problems in the OLP has been the weakly articulated ideal curriculum. It is crucial that school based curriculum development projects should include a suitable lengthy stage and sufficient financial and professional support to pronounce their ideas in a unambiguous way, so this "platform of ideas" can guide the further curriculum development. If this is not the case it is unwise even thinking of locally producing curriculum materials for an external market on a commercial base.

2. If the ideas are well-established it is meaningful to conceive curriculum design and curriculum materials development as mutual tasks; both the design and the materials should be tested together (McFadden, 1991). In the first place the curriculum materials should be taken as 'examples' of the design, in our case an open learning program. In the OLP it appeared that schools could not cope with the pressure of producing materials for a nation-wide market. Another problem was that because of the weakly developed ideal curriculum and the lack of experience of the authors in curriculum development the materials turned out to be highly traditional.

3. In the OLP neither the curriculum design nor the curriculum materials were evaluated. Neglecting this vital component of curriculum design and development was surely an omission in the OLP. Especially a thoroughly field-testing of the materials should be part of the evaluation.

4. For several reasons we think creating a publishing company, as done in the OLP, is not a sound solution. We have concluded that the problems in curriculum design and development were not solved with the foundation of the publishing company but only shifted to that company. But, more fundamentally, commercial publishers have built up experience in the developing, editing, producing and marketing of textbooks, which a company grounded by schools has not and will not reach in a relatively short period.

In a stage in which the ideas are formalized in curriculum products it is advisable to contact educational publishers in making plans for the dissemination and the further development of curriculum materials. But for a successful collaboration between an innovation project and publishers some conditions have to be fulfilled.

Firstly, the commercial producing of innovative materials is blocked by the perceived financial risks for the publisher. A way to overcome this problem is reserving a part of the money spent on innovations by Governments for the production of curriculum materials.

Secondly, we saw in the OLP that the incentives for the authors were quite low, one of the reasons why many teachers were not interested in becoming an author.

We think that it is important that authors receive a proper reward for their efforts.

We realise that the suggestions above imply a substantial public funding for developing curriculum materials. Sabar (1990) doubts if national educational systems will be willing to bear these expenses. But on the other hand national educational systems spend large amounts of money on all kinds of innovation projects and many of these projects do not even reach the stage of implementation and the OLP was not an exception of this rule. We argued that adequate curriculum materials are a conditio sine qua non for realising an open learning program, so it is worthwhile investing money in curriculum development in order to increase the changes for implementation.

If the authors are properly reward it also possible to make demands on professional skills of the authors in developing curriculum materials. It is a misconception that good teachers are automatically good writers of curriculum materials too. Except of the few "natural talents", most teachers need training and coaching to become a good author.

Thirdly, there is another critical facet in the collaboration between educational publishers and public funded innovation projects which McFadden (1991) calls the 'question of control'. The danger is not imaginary that educational publishers try to undo the original materials from their innovative characteristics to enlarge the group of the potential users and make the publishing of the materials more profitable for them. From the point of view of the desired educational change than the mark of the cooperation is overshot. It is crucial to make sound arrangements to safeguard the original intentions of the educational renewal. A way to do so is giving the copyright ownership to a public institution representing the authors or the people responsible for the innovation.

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Figure 1: The OLP-Project